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ABSTRACT

The Reading Enrichment/Achievement Demonstration Project (READ) has provided continuing studies, since 1976, of sustained silent reading programs that use paperback books. The 1980-81 Project READ involved 1,100 young people in the juvenile justice system who attended 25 alternative schools and community-based programs. The public school portion of the project involved four junior high schools from the Washington, D.C., public school system. Several basic premises of the project's motivational reading programs were confirmed by data obtained from (1) pretest and posttest results on the Gates-MacGintie Reading Survey, (2) a semantic differential scale designed to assess student and teacher attitudes toward both paperback books and reading, (3) interviews with public school students, and (4) written questionnaires. The reading program did encourage students to develop comprehension skills and strategies necessary for independent reading, highly motivating paperback books did provide the broad selection of reading material needed to meet highly diversified student interests, and a motivational reading program did change participants' attitudes toward reading and paperback books as well as their reading habits and behaviors. (HOD)

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Non-Stop Reading for Teenagers: What We Have Learned and Where We Go From Here

Joan D. Coley

Project READ has provided on-going studies of non-stop reading (sustained silent reading) paperback book programs since 1976. During that time Project READ has provided services for over 50,000 young people and their teachers in over 500 public schools, institutions, alternative and community based programs in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Over one-million paperbacks have been distributed free to these schools as part of the Project's motivational reading program. What follows is a discussion of the 1980/81 project results with two groups of students: a) a group of troubled youth attending alternative schools or community-based programs and, b) students in public junior high schools.

Population

Eleven hundred young people in the juvenile justice system who attended 25 alternative schools and community-based programs participated in Project READ's motivational reading program. These 25 programs were selected from 200 applications. Of the 25 sites, 20 were co-educational, one was an all male facility, and four were female facilities. Residential care was provided at eight of the 25 programs. The number of students served in the educational programs varied. Four programs provided daily instruction for 100 to 150 students; three programs included 50 to 100 students; 16 programs included ten to 50 students; and two programs included fewer than ten students daily.

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The average student/teacher ratio was 9:1, however, the range was from 4:1 to 24:1. The length of stay of these young people in the 25 programs ranged from less than three months to more than one year. It is important to note that in most alternative schools this shorter length of stay limits the amount of continuous instruction as compared to the relatively stable public school population.

From the Washington, D.C. public school system, which is 96% Black, 1,397 students in four junior high schools were selected from a field of ten potential sites. Two of the four schools were designated to implement Project READ's motivational reading program, while the remaining two schools were used as comparison schools. All four schools contained seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. A total of 743 students were enrolled in the Project READ schools which had a student/teacher ratio of 24:1. The comparison schools with 654 students had a student/teacher ratio of 17:1.

Results From The Study

Based on data obtained from 1) pre-and post-test results on the Gates MacGintie Reading Survey; 2) a semantic differential scale designed to assess student and teacher attitudes toward both paperback books and reading; 3) interviews with public school students; and 4) written questionnaires , several basic premises of the Project READ motivational reading programs were confirmed:

- A motivational reading program encourages students to develop those comprehension skills and strategies necessary

for independent reading.

- Highly motivating paperback books provide the broad selection of reading material needed to meet highly diversified student interests.
- A motivational reading program changes participants' attitudes toward reading and paperback books as well as changing their reading habits and behaviors.

Independent Reading Strategies

Pre-and post-test score results from both the public school portion of the project and the alternative school portion showed gains above what might be expected based on performance in previous years. Table 1 shows the results from the public schools. Any change in NCE greater than zero indicates a degree of program effectiveness. It can be noted that the NCE for the public school experimental groups was greater than zero for all grades in both schools with the exception of the 9th grade in school 2. What is not evident from the table, but is significant for the program is that the most dramatic shifts in achievement occured in the area of comprehension rather than in vocabulary. This trend is encouraging because of the importance of comprehension skills for mature readers.

Table 1
Public School Students*
Gates-MacGinitie Total Reading Score Grade Equivalents

	Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 9	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
Experimental (N=506)	(N=164)		(N=183)		(N=159)	
School 1	4.3	5.1#	6.1	7.3#	6.9	7.4#
School 2	4.3	5.1#	4.9	5.8#	6.0	6.1
Comparison (N=329)	(N=92)		(N=132)		(N=105)	
School 1	4.1	4.4	4.1	4.7#	5.2	5.2#
School 2	5.5	5.4	5.8	5.7	6.5	5.9

*These data are based on matched pre- and post-test scores
#Normal curve equivalent differences were greater than zero

A comparison of reading test scores in Project READ alternative schools and community-based programs shows a similar pattern as the one for public junior high schools. Because students in this group were not tested at comparable times and because grade level designations for placement are not identifiable in these programs, normal curve equivalents cannot be provided. However, to determine whether significant changes occured from pre- to post-testing, scores were subjected to "t" test analysis.

Overall, there is evidence indicating that a significant change occurred for Comprehension and Total Reading scores. No significant change was realized in Vocabulary. When considering the 21 schools for which there were complete pre-and post-test data, 15 schools showed significant growth from pre- to post-testing for the Total Reading scores.

Table 2
Alternative Program Students*
Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test Score Grade Equivalents

	PRE	POST	DIFFERENCE	"t"	p
TOTAL	5.9	6.6	7 Months	12.72	.001
COMPREHENSION	6.0	6.7	7 Months	4.03	.001
VOCABULARY	6.5	6.8	3 Months	1.36	NS

*These data are based on match pre-and post-test scores.

In addition to the test score evidence for the growth of comprehension skills as a result of nonstop reading, there was evidence from the student interviews which suggested that students who participated in non-stop reading employed more independent reading strategies.

In response to the interview question "How would you help someone who is having trouble reading?" 56% of the students from the comparison schools suggested strategies which placed heavy emphasis in word identification strategies; this was true for only 22% of the students in the experimental schools. Instead, the students in the experimental schools suggested independent strategies such as library or dictionary use. Moreover, students in the experimental schools suggested a "systematic strategy" for dealing with a reading problem 2½ times more frequently than did students in the comparison school. In short, comparisons of student interviews for the experimental and comparison schools indicate a strong tendency on the part of students who had participated in non-stop reading to place emphasis on reading for meaning. This is indeed encouraging, for this is precisely the type of

notion of the reading process which is evident in mature readers.

Diversified Needs and Interests

Much has been written about "typical" students interests in reading material. Data from Project READ suggest that students are greatly interested in any story which is related to a familiar movie or TV show. A compilation of the most popular books from 1981 appears below. The list is given in order of preference and reflects the common interests of teenagers.

1981 MOST POPULAR PAPERBACK TITLES

Amityville Horror	Movie, TV, Theatre
Carrie	Movie, TV, Theatre
Dallas	Movie, TV, Theatre
Dressed to Kill	Movie, TV, Theatre
Go Ask Alice	Movie, TV, Theatre
A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich	Movie, TV, Theatre
I Want to Keep My Baby	Movie, TV, Theatre
Jaws	Movie, TV, Theatre
Popeye	Movie, TV, Theatre
Roots	Movie, TV, Theatre
Star Wars	Movie, TV, Theatre
Are You There God? It's Me Margaret	Contemporary Fiction
Dawn	Contemporary Fiction
I Can Stop Anytime I Want	Contemporary Fiction
Killing Mr. Griffin	Contemporary Fiction
MAD Series	Contemporary Fiction
My Name Is Davy, I'm an Alcoholic	Contemporary Fiction
Guinness Book of World Records	Contemporary Fact
Teenage Body Book	Contemporary Fact
Buried Alive: Janis Joplin	Biographies, People and Cultures
50 Great Chost Stories	Science Fiction, Mysteries and The Supernatural

When students were asked which types of books they would like to read more often, the categories they selected, in order of preference were:

Science Fiction
Comics
Teenage novels and love stories
Sports, motorcycles, cars, racing
King Fu
Books about Native American Indians
Crafts, creative arts
Mysteries and horror stories
History
Biographies (sports figures, rock musicians, etc.)
Drug stories
Westerns
More adult books, best sellers
Books published by feminist presses
Books in Spanish
Books with pictures and large print

Reading Habits, Attitudes, and Behaviors

Changing the reading habits, attitudes, and behaviors of reluctant readers is an important component of Project READ's motivational reading program. A pre-post-attitude scale was administered to determine attitudes about reading and about paperback books. The results of the attitude survey indicate that there were significant positive shifts in both attitude toward reading and attitude toward paperback books. An even greater positive shift was seen in attitude toward paperback books (4% increase in alternative schools; 1% increase in public schools) than in attitude toward reading. This shift may be a reflection of the initial positive attitude which students had toward reading.

Additional evidence of positive attitudes was found on the questionnaires given to public school students. In response to the question "What did you like best about non-stop reading?" the most frequently occuring responses, in order were:

- the books were interesting
- Non-Stop Reading gave me time to read;
- Non-Stop Reading helped me improve my reading skills;
- there were no interruptions;
- it was quiet;
- it was fun;
- it was a time ro relax;
- it let me read what I wanted to.

On the same questionnaire students were asked what they would change about non-stop reading. The most frequently occuring responses, in order, were:

- no change is needed;
- make non-step reading longer;
- provide more books.

In summary, the evidence available from Project READ for 1980-81 indicated that the project was successful in developing reading skills, providing for diversified student interests, and changing student attitudes. It appears that when students are given the opportunity to practice their reading skills using material which is interesting to them they indeed grow toward maturity in the area of reading and they learn to view reading as an enjoyable pasttime.